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RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1071  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000370

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2016

TAGS: [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: FIJI THINKING SERIOUSLY ABOUT JOINING COALITION IN  
IRAQ: URGENT ACTION REQUEST

REF: A. SUVA 352

[1](#)B. SUVA 340 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D)

#### Summary

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[1](#)1. (C) Chief Executive of the Fiji Ministry of Home Affairs Korovavala told us on Sept. 11 that recent conversations have convinced him the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) should join the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq. He wants to make the case strongly to a Cabinet subcommittee on Sept. [1](#)21. He envisions sending a company, perhaps by the end of the year, without taking numbers away from other RFMF deployments. He specifically requested detail on "what can Fiji gain" from such a deployment in concrete assistance from the USG: military support; specialized equipment; other advantages in trade or otherwise. He also asked in what parts of Iraq the RFMF might serve and on what duties. Please provide as detailed a response as possible as far in advance of Sept. 21 as possible. This is an opportunity.  
End Summary.

#### Fiji Home Affairs CEO advocates Iraq Coalition deployment

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[1](#)2. (C) The CEO of Fiji's Ministry of Home Affairs, Lesi Korovavala, sought an appointment with the Ambassador on Sept. 11. He said Fiji's Cabinet subcommittee on PKO will meet on Sept. 21. Korovavala wants to propose at the meeting that the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) join the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq. Per reftels, this is a request that the U.S. has had on the table here since early 2006, when RFMF Commander Bainimarama returned from a visit to Iraq with a desire to engage RFMF forces more in "the action" in Iraq, a step beyond the static protective role RFMF units now undertake with the UN. Until now, we have heard nothing encouraging from Fiji's civilian leadership. We had heard repeatedly that a Cabinet decision of three years ago to restrict the RFMF to UN "blue hat" roles would be an impediment.

[1](#)3. (C) Two things seem to have changed. First, Korovavala's deputy at Home Affairs, Ross Ligairi, just returned from a trip to the Middle East. He was to assess current Fiji PKO operations in Iraq and with the MFO in the Sinai as part of a Cabinet review of what Fiji's PKO posture ought to be. Korovavala said Ligairi returned convinced that joining the Coalition is a good idea. Also, the OIC of Fiji's contingent with UNAMI, BG Iowane Naivalurua, has been home in Suva on a break. We spoke with him last Friday. He was upbeat about

the Coalition, and he deeply appreciated that Gen. Casey had invited him to a periodic Coalition briefing in late July. We urged him to talk with the Minister and CEO of Home Affairs. Korovavala mentioned they had a conversation over the weekend. Korovavala was impressed at the degree to which the RFMF's UNAMI force has made connections with the Coalition. Now, Korovavala is intent to make the case to remove the "blue hat" restriction and to urge Cabinet approval for Coalition participation.

A Company by end of 2006 is possible

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14. (C) When asked, Korovavala made clear he is thinking any RFMF troops to the Coalition should be "an addition, not a substitute" for the current UN contingent. When asked, Korovavala said he is thinking in terms of company strength. As for timing, Korovavala said if the Cabinet subcommittee were to approve the concept Sept. 21, a proposal could go to the full Cabinet around the end of October. With approval there, which could be very quick, actual deployment could take place a couple of months later. Korovavala said he is pretty confident that, if all the arguments are in place, the Cabinet subcommittee (Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Attorney General, Finance, and Public Enterprises) will be supportive. If the subcommittee is supportive, everything else will fall into place.

Question to answer ASAP: what's in it for Fiji?

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15. (C) Korovavala emphasized that, as Home Affairs prepares its PKO paper for the Cabinet subcommittee, it needs "some more ummph" to add to standard arguments about the generalized benefits for Fiji of contributing to PKO. He put it bluntly: "What can Fiji gain?" An aspect is military:

SUVA 00000370 002 OF 002

"what kinds of things can Fiji look forward to regarding support" for the RFMF unit that joins the Coalition? "Can the U.S. reconsider how it supports the RFMF beyond PKO training?" "Can special equipment be considered?" When asked what sorts of special equipment, Korovavala mentioned "hard skinned vehicles" as an example. Fiji also wants to know "what types of duty" would be likely and in what part of Iraq? Korovavala has heard that Gen. Casey sent a letter to the RFMF four weeks ago asking for staff officers at the Coalition headquarters. He (and we) would like any details about such a request. Korovavala also broadened the query to ask what other sorts of USG favors might Fiji obtain if it joins the Coalition? He mentioned "trade" as a possible area of interest.

Comment and action request

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16. (C) This is a breakthrough. Neither Korovavala nor any other heavyweights in Home Affairs or MFA had given a sense of a possible green light in the past. It is not clear to us that the Cabinet subcommittee will make a quick and easy decision. Per previous reporting, there is a degree of concern at the top about Fiji's degree of involvement in PKO in general. Still, the U.S. now has an opportunity. Clearly, the Fiji Government will want to know "what is in it for us" in a very practical way. We have discouraged any thought of textile concessions, based on past guidance from USTR, but we need guidance on what sorts of things the USG is prepared to provide. Home Affairs needs whatever concrete response we can generate ASAP, as far before Sept. 21 as possible.  
DINGER